

## **(1985). Asbestos in Alviso, Epidemiological Studies and Surveillance Section.**

### **BACKGROUND**

Alviso is a small community located near the city of San Jose. According to the 1980 U.S. Census, it has a predominantly Hispanic population of almost 2000 people in 540 households. Because of its location and low elevation it has been subjected to frequent flooding and levees have been constructed to provide protection from these floods. The most recent flood occurred in the winter of 1982-83.

In the spring of 1983 excavation on a levee by the local water district uncovered whitish material, a Cal/OSHA industrial hygienist suspected contained asbestos. Laboratory analysis confirmed that this material contained  $30 \pm 10\%$  asbestos, including both chrysotile and crocidolite. Samples of nearby soil contained approximately 3% asbestos as measured by light microscopy (LM).

Inquiries by the Toxic Substances Control Division (TSCD) of the Department of Health Services (DOHS) established that waste from an asbestos cement pipe manufacturing plant in nearby Santa Clara had been dumped in an Alviso landfill during the 1950's and 1960's, and that some of this waste had also been used as landfill throughout the town. In the early 1960's, the first large-scale attempts at flood control were carried out. At this time, the Guadalupe River, which flowed by the landfill site, was straightened, and levees were constructed on the banks. During the process of straightening the river, a new channel was dug directly through the landfill site. It has not been determined where the resulting fill was disposed of. It was also learned that, despite previous efforts, Alviso had been flooded almost annually during this period. In fact, it was because of serious flooding during the previous two winters that the water district had been carrying out construction on the levee when the asbestos-containing material was discovered.

Because of the possibility that asbestos could be broadly distributed in the soil throughout Alviso, DOHS decided to carry out a more thorough investigation to determine the extent of contamination.